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Foreword

The Framework for Improving Minority Student Achievement was developed to provide a common and shared framework for schools, districts, parents, students, businesses, policymakers, and the community to use in their efforts to diminish and eventually eliminate the achievement gap. The framework is a comprehensive approach, with a compilation of proven practices and strategies that have been successful in narrowing the gap between student subgroups. While targeted interventions are necessary, the goal of this framework is to create schools in which virtually all students are maximizing their potential and are learning at high achievement levels, as defined by national and state standards.

Executive Summary

Over the last 30 years, the demographics of Utah have changed significantly. What has emerged is a growing population of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities are generally defined as a group of people who have a different culture, religion, or language than the dominate one within the place, region, or country in which they live. According to the *Census Brief 2000: Race and Ethnicity in Utah*, prepared by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, the majority of Utahns are White (89.2%). Hispanics are the second-largest ethnic group at 9% followed by Asians at 1.7%, American Indians at 1.3%, Blacks or African Americans at 0.8%, and Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders at 0.7%. It is noteworthy that the Hispanic population in Utah increased 138% from 1990 to 2000, growing more than twice as fast as the Hispanic population nationwide. Asians increased 56% and African Americans increased 52.5% over this past decade. Prior to 1970, the total ethnic minority population was less than two percent. As of 2004, the percentage of ethnic minorities in Utah was approximately 15% (Perlich, 2004). This change has been mirrored in our school enrollments.

In terms of achievement data, Utah student performance reflects the national trends. For example, on the 2007 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics test for eighth grade, 79% of Utah's White students achieved at or above basic, while only 53% of Hispanics achieved at or above grade level. At the fourth grade level, 88% of Utah's White students achieved at or above basic, compared to 58% of Hispanic students. Results are similar in reading/language arts and science tests given by NAEP.

Utah Core Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) are state-developed assessments specifically designed to measure student understanding of the Core Curriculum. These state tests also reveal a disparity among groups. For example, the Utah Core CRT Mathematics 2007 data for eighth grade reflects that 74.9% of White students scored proficient, compared to 58.1% of Pacific Islanders, 47.5% of Hispanics, 46.9% of African Americans, and 45.4% of American Indian students.

All stakeholders (schools, districts, administrators, parents, students, businesses, policymakers, and the community) must be involved in the effort to eliminate this gap. This report, based on research and best practices, serves as a guide to facilitate and support the work of the stakeholders. In order to build a framework for success for all students, which includes eliminating the achievement gap through targeted strategies, the following components are essential: using data to make informed decisions; creating an inclusive school culture; developing a culturally competent staff; ensuring educator quality; enhancing teaching and learning; demanding a rigorous and relevant curriculum; planning for strategic prevention and intervention; collaborating with parents and families; establishing community and business partnerships; and holding all stakeholders accountable.

Historical Perspective

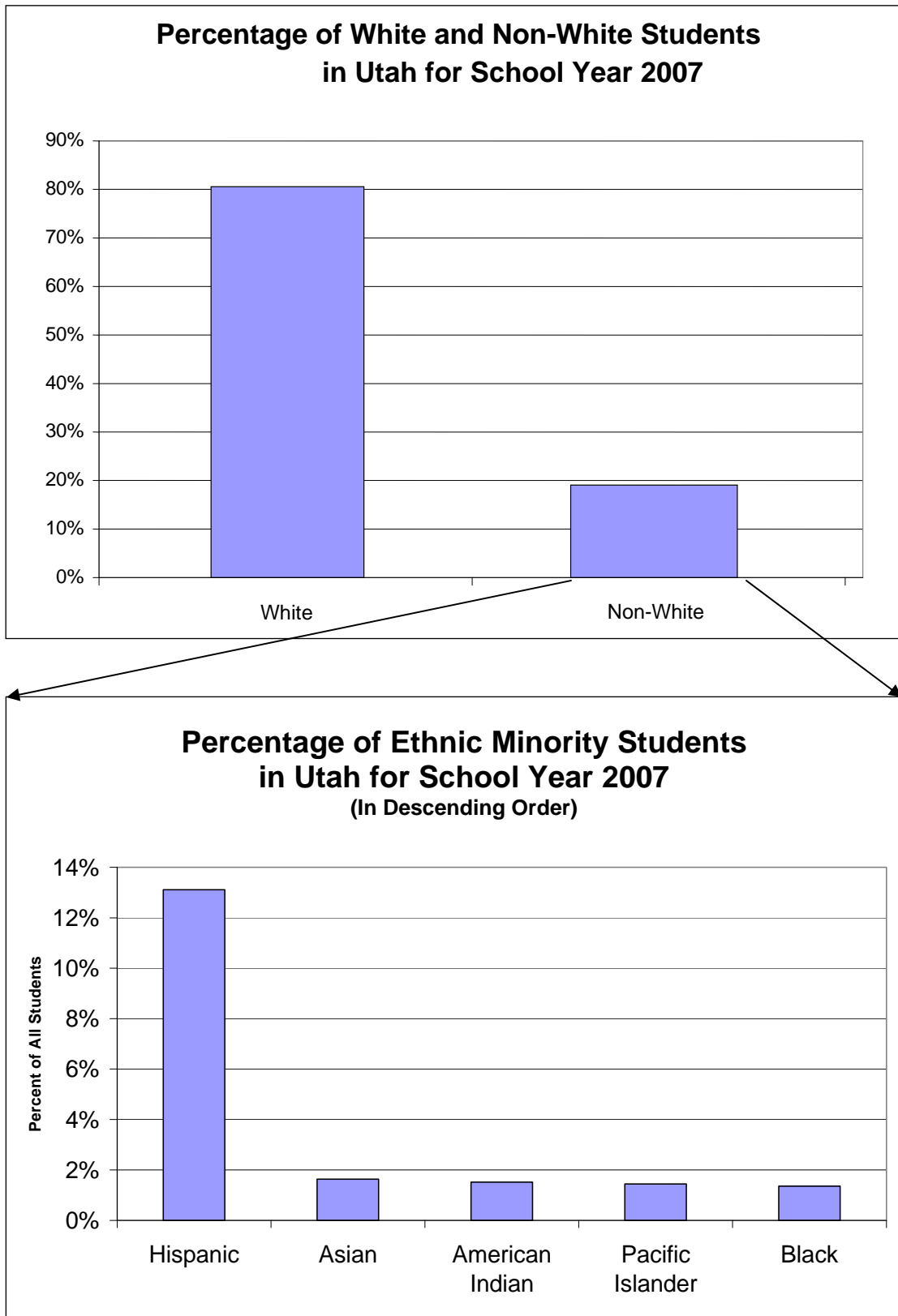
Over the last 30 years, the demographics of Utah have changed significantly. What has emerged is a growing population of ethnic minorities. Ethnic minorities are generally defined as a group of people who have a different culture, religion or language from the dominant one within the place, region, or country in which they live. According to the Census Brief 2000: Race and Ethnicity in Utah, prepared by the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget, the majority of Utahns are White (89.2%), and Hispanics are the second-largest ethnic group at 9%, followed by Asians at 1.7%, American Indians at 1.3%, Blacks or African Americans at 0.8%, and Native Hawaiians or Other Pacific Islanders at 0.7%.

It is noteworthy that the Hispanic population in Utah increased 138% from 1990 to 2000, growing more than twice as fast as the Hispanic population nationwide. Asians increased 56% and African Americans increased 52.5% over this past decade. Prior to 1970, the total ethnic minority population was less than two percent. As of 2004, the percentage of ethnic minorities in Utah was approximately 15% (Perlich, 2004). This change has been mirrored in the 2006 school enrollment figures, as reflected in Figure 1 (p. 6).



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Figure 1: Percentage of White and Non-White Students in Utah for School Year 2007



The charts below show the local education agencies, commonly called school districts, with the highest percentage of self-identified ethnic minority students for the 2006-2007 school year. Ten districts educate 82% of all ethnic minority students in the state. As of October 2007, Granite School District had the largest ethnic minority enrollment, with 25,814 students.

Figure 2: Utah Student Population: Top 10 Local Education Agencies (School Districts) With the Largest Share of the State Ethnic Minority Student Population, SY 2007

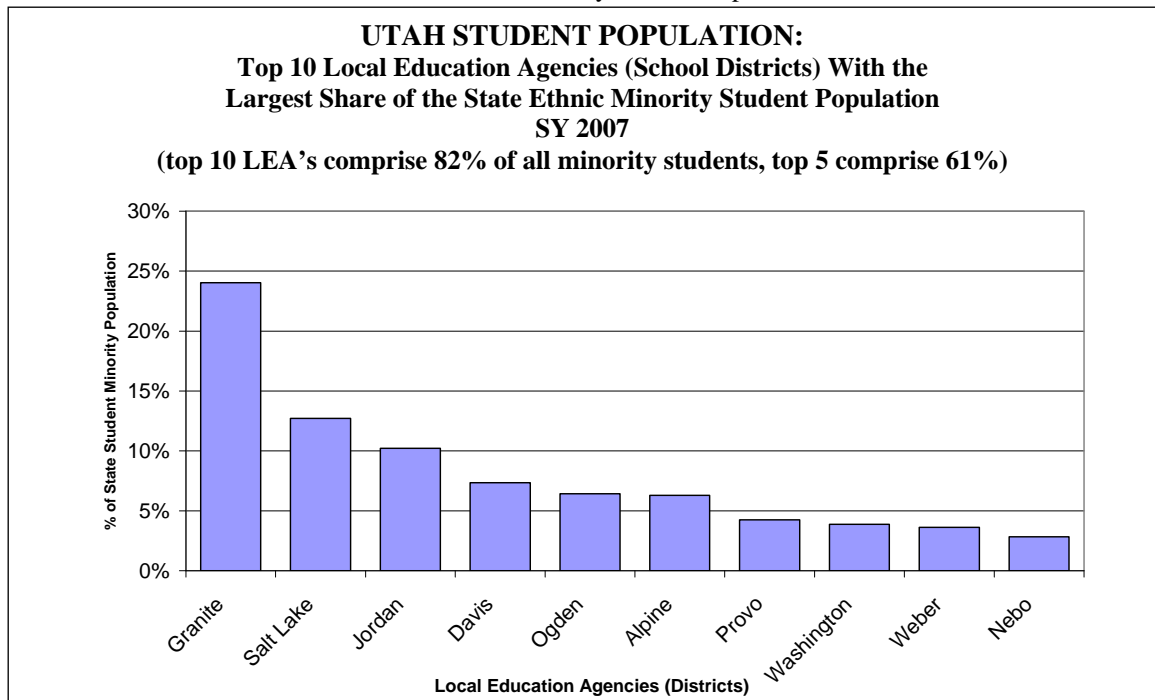


Figure 3: Local Education Agencies Student Population: Percentage of School District's Student Population Which Are Ethnic Minorities, SY 2007

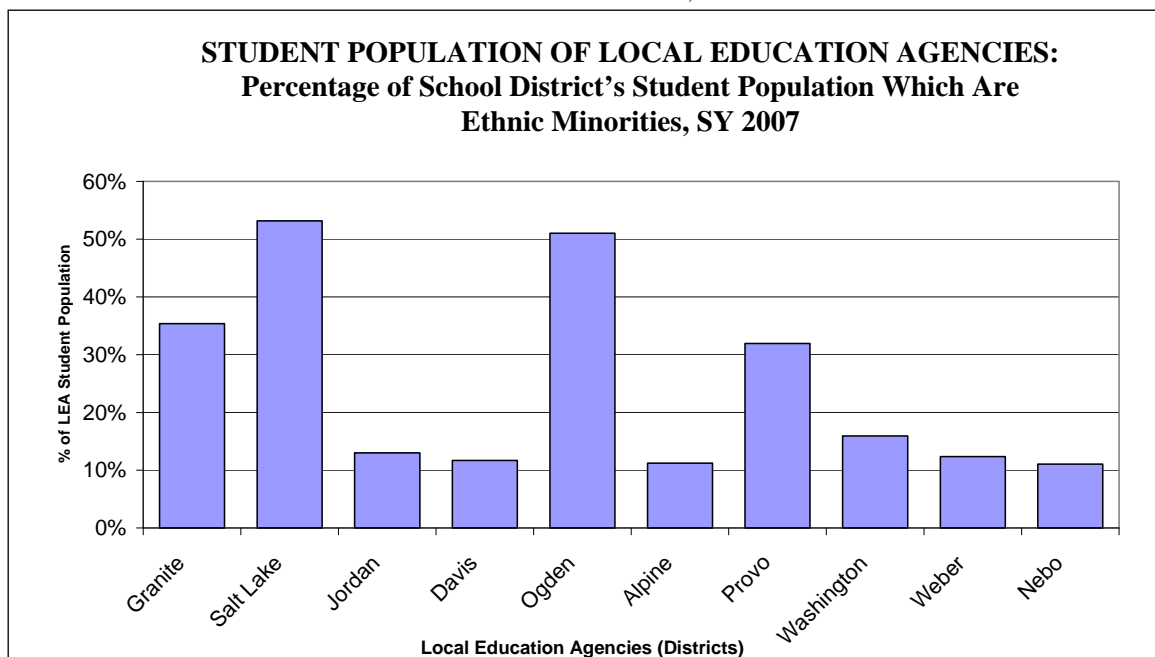


Figure 2 & 3: Compiled from Cognos Cubes by Jennifer Lambert on Jan 11, 2008. Figures based on October 1, 2006 enrollment.

While it would be easy to concentrate efforts on just these ten districts, further analysis of the data reflects that most of the districts in the state have experienced growth in the number of ethnic minority students. Utah's minority population is expected to reach 20% by 2010. **The achievement gap and lower graduation rates for ethnic minorities are a concern for all districts.**

A number of districts have seen the percentage of ethnic minority students grow to the extent that they make up the majority of the student population; therefore, these districts are described as "majority-minority districts." For example, San Juan District does not make the list of the top ten districts that have experienced the largest percentage of total minority population, but San Juan District is a majority-minority district. In addition, several other districts from across the state have also experienced sudden increases of ethnic minority student enrollments. It should be noted that increased ethnic minority student numbers, even majority-minority, do not ensure inclusion and respect for cultural contributions.

Figure 4: Majority-Minority Districts and Charter Schools, 2007

District	Ethnicity							Ethnic Minority	Ethnic Minority
	Asian	Black	White	Hispanic	American Indian	Pacific Islander	Un-known Race		
	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Count	Percentage
UINTAH RIVER HIGH	0	0	3	0	55	0	0	55	94.8%
SAN JUAN DISTRICT	3	9	1200	65	1609	13	0	1699	58.6%
SALT LAKE CITY DISTRICT	980	1200	11127	8850	510	1186	92	12726	53.1%
OGDEN DISTRICT	145	429	6158	5619	166	61	0	6420	51.0%
SUCCESS SCHOOL	3	1	27	23	3	4	0	34	55.7%

"Majority-minority" is defined as an LEA in which non-White students comprise a majority of the LEA's population.

With the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in place and the Utah State Board of Education focusing on improving academic achievement, data reveals that there is still a disparity between the student groups in our nation and in our state. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests are given to a representative sample of students at specified grade levels every two years. For example, on the 2005 NAEP Mathematics test, 82% of Utah's White students achieved at or above basic, while only 60% of Hispanic students achieved at or above grade level. In science, 80% of Utah's White students scored at or above grade level, compared to only 45% of Latino students. The 2007 NAEP Mathematics test for eighth grade revealed 79% of Utah's White students achieved at or above basic, while only 53% of Hispanics achieved at or above grade level. At the fourth grade level, 88% of Utah's White students achieved at or above basic compared to 58% of Hispanic students. Results are similar on the 2007 NAEP reading/language arts and science tests.

Utah Core Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs) are state-developed assessments specifically designed to measure student understanding of the Core Curriculum. These state tests also reveal a disparity among groups. Core CRT Language Arts 2006 data for eighth grades reflects that 83.2% of White students scored proficient compared to 62.2% of African Americans, 53.4% of Latinos, and 51.9% of American Indian students. Math course-taking patterns also reflect the disparity. From 1999 to 2005, a greater proportion of White eighth graders took upper-level math courses. For example, two or three times as many White students took Geometry as compared to Hispanic students. During this same period of time, there were approximately three times more eighth grade Hispanic students taking Math 7 compared to White eighth grade students (based on percentage of students). The Utah Core CRT Mathematics 2007 scores for eighth grade reveals that the gap persists—74.9% of White students scored proficient, compared to 58.1% of Pacific Islanders, 47.5% of Hispanics, 46.9% of African Americans, and 45.4% of American Indian students. The academic achievement record of ethnic minority students in America and in Utah reflects a gap between most ethnic groups and their White peers.

Graduation rates are often used as a measure of academic achievement. Because there is no clear, agreed-on formula for calculating the graduation rate, the numbers at the national level are confusing and, in some cases, conflicting. Utah did not begin to collect dropout counts at the student level until the 2004-05 school year, when the Class of 2007 was in the tenth grade. As a result, Utah cannot currently determine graduation rates for all subgroups. This report will only reflect the Utah graduation rate for a synthetic cohort that cannot be considered official. Thus defined, the percentage breakdown for the students graduating in 2004-2005 school year is as follows: All students, 82.1%; American Indian or Alaska Native, 63.5%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 79.2%; Black (non-Hispanic), 68.2%; Hispanic, 63.3%; and White (non-Hispanic), 84.8%. The breakdown for the percentage of students graduating in 2005-2006 school year is as follows: All Students, 83.0%; American Indian or Alaska Native, 74.3%; Asian or Pacific Islander, 89.2%; Black (non-Hispanic), 81.9%; Hispanic, 70.6%; and White (non-Hispanic), 88.4%. The disparity in the graduation rate is the result of many factors.

One of the factors that affects the graduation rate is the number of students who have limited formal education. Many Utah schools are not equipped to meet the needs of immigrants, migrants, and refugee students who enter the school system after kindergarten or the primary grades. While these children bring rich cultural experiences and values to their new schools, they enter school at various levels of English language proficiency and academic skill. Adjustment to cultural differences and mobility factors may also be obstacles to academic success. In many cases, new students have had limited formal education before entering the state. Yet these newly enrolled students are expected to achieve at the same level as students who have been in the educational system for years—thus further widening or distorting the achievement gap.

Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr.'s Student Achievement Working Group surmised that closing the achievement gap will require a sustained, complex, and multifaceted approach. Consequently, no one simple policy solution will close the achievement gap by itself. A constant, focused, and systemic effort to raise student achievement will require continual guidance and support of Utah's education policymakers.

Educators must begin in pre-K to ensure that all students are achieving at or beyond the expected standard. At all grade levels, K-12, strategic interventions must be implemented as soon as the academic concern is diagnosed. The achievement gap widens if not addressed. Eliminating the gap requires a commitment to equity. Excellence for all students means an equitable distribution of resources and effort. Our goal is to create schools in which virtually **all** students are learning at high academic levels. This report serves as a framework for schools, districts, administrators, parents, policymakers, and the community to use in their efforts to diminish and eventually eliminate the achievement gap.



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A Framework for Success

Introduction

Historically, both in the United States of America and in the State of Utah, a high percentage of ethnic minority students perform at the lowest academic levels, drop out of school more often, and enroll in post-secondary institutions at lower percentages than their White peers. The achievement gap is real.

For years, the ethnic minority students were blamed for the achievement gap. That assumption was wrong. If the achievement gap is to be eliminated, the focus, energy and effort must begin with the education system looking internally. We must look at what goes on inside schools and classrooms. Systemic change begins when administrators and all school personnel, as well as policymakers, take responsibility for improving the academic performance for all students and work collectively toward positive solutions.

All stakeholders must be involved in the effort to close the gap by analyzing data to define the issues, understanding the reasons these issues exist, and determining how best to address concerns. This requires focused school and district-level actions that include equity as an integral part of the solution.

According to the Utah State Office of Education, equity is defined as the

...fair and just treatment of students, staff, and community members... [equity] must be the cornerstone of an educational framework. Achieving equity means individual differences are valued; high expectations are held for all; instruction occurs in inclusive environments; diversity is recognized and appreciated; and discrimination, stereotyping, and bias are not accepted (*Principles for Equity in Utah's Public Schools*).

Successfully integrating excellence and equity is the path to closing the achievement gap. However, it is imperative that the obstacles or barriers along the path be noted and dealt with. Barriers include:

- Unequal access to courses and/or programs.
- Inadequate academic guidance.
- Continuous tracking or ability grouping.
- Insufficient funds/support for such things as dual-language programs and literacy centers.
- Inadequate home-school connections.
- Excessive identification of ethnic minorities in special education.

- Sparse identification of ethnic minorities in gifted education.
- Cultural intolerance—the inability to value diversity.
- Scarce culturally relevant curriculum and instructional materials.
- Failure to recognize and understand cultural nuances.
- Low teacher expectation—the perception that because of a person's ethnicity and/or language, he/she is not able to perform academically at the same level as his/her White peers.
- Cultural incompetence among educators—lack of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for working in a culturally diverse environment.
- Institutional racism—the collective failure of educational organizations to provide appropriate and professional services to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin.

Deliberate efforts must be made by educators at all levels to recognize and remove these barriers. The negative effects of institutional, cultural, socioeconomic, and/or philosophical barriers prevent ethnic minority students from achieving at their maximum potential.

In order to build a framework for success for all students, which includes closing the achievement gap and raising achievement for ethnic minorities, the following components are essential:

- Using data to inform decisions
- Creating an inclusive school culture
- Developing a culturally competent staff
- Ensuring educator quality
- Enhancing teaching and learning
- Demanding a rigorous and relevant curriculum
- Planning for strategic prevention and intervention
- Collaborating with parents and families
- Establishing community and business partnerships
- Holding all stakeholders accountable

Using Data to Inform Decisions

Introduction

Closing the achievement gap and improving the achievement of ethnic minority students must be a clear goal for the state, as well as all districts, schools, and educators. This requires looking beyond percentile and median scores to looking at a diverse set of data such as test scores by subgroup, individual students' scores, scores disaggregated by teacher, and summative as well as formative assessments.

Critical Analysis

Educators, along with parents and students, must learn to look at test scores thoroughly. Stakeholders should review scores for specific skill deficits, look for trends over time, and then use the data to inform instruction and learning decisions. Facts, not opinions, about student learning or non-learning should be the basis on which decisions are made. This requires that data be collected and analyzed, so that appropriate decisions regarding teacher and administrative action in terms of curriculum and instruction can be made. Critical analysis of data is necessary to determine weaknesses and strengths within a system, as well as with individual teachers and/or curricula, in order to determine the disparities and disproportionalities among groups of students as well as between individual students. There must be a willingness to ask difficult questions and to look for real answers. Data analysis is a crucial component necessary for determining what must be done to eliminate the achievement gap.

Test scores, program placements, course enrollments, and post-secondary pursuits must be studied along with teachers' varied instructional strategies to determine the changes necessary to ensure improvement in student learning. Data should be used to assist with structuring the interventions needed to correct situations and ensure that all students complete school successfully.

Most schools have easy access to existing data such as student and staff attendance, discipline referrals, suspensions, participation in school activities, student grades, and student standardized achievement tests. However, most readily available data are ignored, and when they are used, they are often misused. For example, most schools review standardized achievement data annually. Some schools even analyze long-term patterns of achievement over several years. Such analyses tell very little about the true quality of the school. Is the school effectively meeting academic needs of all students? Do we know which segments of our student body we most effectively serve? Only by way of purposeful disaggregation of the data can we develop an understanding of our students' academic successes and failures. Analyses of ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender, prior achievement, participation or non-participation in school-sponsored activities are some of the obvious and important ways to study

achievement data. Disaggregated data analysis takes time, yet it is essential (Quinn, Greunert, and Valentine, 1999, p. 3).

Responsibilities of Utah State Office of Education

The **Utah State Office of Education**, as part of the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) accountability plan, has developed a large data warehouse with district and school assessment information. School Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) data and U-PASS ratings are available to the general public on the Utah State Office of Education website. The data warehouse information can be used to analyze and track progress trends over time for districts and schools. The USOE should use the data to hold districts accountable for achievement progress trends. Districts should then use the data available to work with schools in need of improvement and to track the progress of students throughout the district, both individually and as part of varied student subgroups.

Responsibilities of Local School Boards

Local boards of education are responsible for setting policies and implementing practices that support student learning. Boards must establish the expectation that all schools will collect, analyze, disaggregate, and use data as part of their annual improvement plans. Data should be organized for analysis and interpretation of patterns to determine strategies that increase learning and reduce the achievement gap. Data should be represented in a variety of ways to note the trends and growth of groups over time. Comparisons must be made among groups to note whether gaps are closing and how cohorts of different groups achieve over periods of time and from level to level. Additionally, schools should be encouraged to adopt programs and strategies, such as Mathematics, Engineering, and Science Achievement (MESA) or Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), that specifically support efforts to increase student achievement in targeted groups.

Responsibilities of School Leadership

Districts and schools must collect and analyze data from a variety of sources, including such things as student attendance and grades, course-taking patterns, grade point averages of classes, discipline referrals and suspensions, student participation in school activities, and achievement test scores. Data results should be used to identify systemic patterns of inequity internal to classrooms, the school, and/or the system. Data should be analyzed for systemically embedded practices that have historically privileged certain groups over others. Patterns that prevent or form barriers in schools from being equally successful with all student groups must be changed. **Principals**, as instructional leaders of schools, should, through the development of collaborative teams, work to build collective commitment to improved learning, to create and maintain shared purpose and trust, to use data to drive decisions, and to target support and guidance toward areas most in need. Principals must establish the expectation that teachers will gather and use data to strategically inform classroom planning, instruction, and intervention support for students.

Responsibilities of Teachers

Teachers must be held accountable for the academic progress of all students. It is no longer sufficient for a teacher to show that students, on the average, make progress. Teachers must disaggregate classroom data to identify trends and patterns of learning and be held accountable for showing that all students, as individuals and as subgroups, make progress. Teacher success should be based on student engagement and student proficiency in the learning process, rather than on perceptions of how their lessons flowed or the amount of material covered. If all students are to succeed, the targets for learning should be clearly identified, excellence should be the expected outcome, and opportunities for regular ongoing assessments and benchmarks to measure their growth should be a regularly consistent part of the experience. In addition, students should also be taught to collect and analyze their own data, to set learning goals, and to measure and monitor their own progress and achievement.

Responsibilities of Counselors

Counselors have long used data for student placement, sometimes resulting in tracking ethnic minority students in lower-level classes. It is imperative that counselors be included in the administrative team that uses data to determine teacher assignments, course schedules, and the organization of the instructional day. In addition, counselors should work with teachers in using individual student data to guide strategies for accelerating learning where needed. Ongoing monitoring of academic progress allows counselors to provide immediate feedback to parents and students ensuring that students do not slip through the cracks.

The Need for Professional Development

Helping district staff, principals, teachers, and counselors understand the assessment data, what it measures, and how to use it for diagnostic and evaluation purposes will require professional development for all entities. Using data to guide instruction is a relatively new educational strategy, and most of the current practitioners will need additional schooling on the methodology. Further, to assist teachers, districts will need data specialists to assist with training and coaching at the school and classroom levels.

Until educators are able to truly understand the data, to see the trends over time, and to develop strategies to address students' needs, ethnic minority children will continue to lag behind. The use of all types of data (qualitative—standardized and diagnostic tests, and qualitative—oral histories, and focus groups) will give educators a more complete picture of what is and what should be done. Open, honest dialogue among the decision-making group will enrich the decisions made.

Creating an Inclusive School Climate

Introduction

By creating positive school climates that respect and appreciate diversity and emphasize excellence and equity, schools will engage students in learning, encourage students to become complex problem solvers, and reward students for competence. A positive school climate is characterized by combining rigor with relationships; encouraging and recognizing achievement; being student centered, with high expectations; and having teachers and staff build positive and nurturing relationships with students. Such schools create a structure that fosters sustained involvement with caring adults who mentor, advise, advocate, and support students throughout their academic careers.

A Sense of Belonging

Ethnic minority students and parents often feel “left out.” An inviting, engaging, inclusive school climate makes each person feel a part of the whole. Such a climate must be spearheaded by the school leadership and modeled daily by staff. Maintaining an inclusive school climate is the responsibility of all members of the school community.

Encouraging ethnic minority students to be involved in extracurricular activities is one strategy for creating that sense of belonging. Everyone wants to be a part of the team. Aggressively recruiting for academic clubs and special interest organizations, not just athletic teams, would be another way of engaging ethnic minority students.



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A Climate of High Expectations

A climate of high expectations, in which all students are experiencing high and equitable success, should permeate all aspects of school life. A culture of academics and high expectations for all manifests itself in equal, open access to honors and Advanced Placement courses, in student recognitions that include all students in a great variety of areas, and in parents included as partners in the educational success of their children. High expectations refer to a climate where the staff members expect all students to do well, believe in their ability to influence student achievement, and are held accountable for student learning.

Responsibilities of Local School Boards

Local school boards should ensure that policies and procedures are in place that demonstrate value of diversity and respect for the individual. Policies regarding school committees and councils should insist on representation of all facets of the school community. Opportunities to dialogue with ethnic minority parents should be frequent and fruitful. Boards should make a strong statement with regard to diversity in hiring. Establishing hiring benchmark goals and monitoring the progress of those goals by the Board would set the precedent for district and school personnel.

Responsibilities of the School Leadership

Both district and school leaders serve as drum majors of the cause for an inclusive school climate. They set the tone and the level of expectation in this arena. The three areas in which school leadership has the most impact on inclusion are hiring practices, parental involvement, and teacher/student relationships. School leaders should make diversity a priority in hiring practices, especially among certified personnel, because students often feel a sense of belonging if they simply see an adult who looks like them. Ethnic minority parents often become involved because the principal extends a personal invitation to them. But whatever the reason for their arrival at the school, through personal invitation or to register a complaint, their voices must be heard and respected. The most important relationship is that between the student and the teacher. The school leadership should create programs that enhance that relationship, such as a mentor/advocate program, and create conditions such as smaller class sizes that help sustain this relationship.

The ACT Policy Report, *School Relationships Foster Success for African American Students*, suggests that improving school relationships will improve African Americans' (and perhaps all students') educational expectations and post-secondary participation. The study expresses three recommendations for achieving these goals:

- Districts should evaluate school relationship models (including the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Personal Adult Advocate Model), determine the essential characteristics and needs of their students, and implement a program that best fosters these important relationships and begins at least in middle school.
- The school district's implementation framework should include cultural, social, and economic diversity awareness and training components so that staff members are sensitive to these potential differences and do not inadvertently allow them to become barriers to building effective relationships with students.
- Schools should make available school-based and school-sponsored activities that connect students to adults in their school, and encourage all students to participate in these activities.

Responsibilities of Teachers

The relationship that has the strongest impact on learning is the one between the teacher and student. Teachers are ultimately responsible for creating an inclusive classroom in which all students are respected and valued. Simple steps such as greeting students by name as they enter the classroom or making sure bulletin boards reflect all ethnicities in the class are a part of creating an inclusive climate. Students need to feel safe in the classroom, safe to take the risks necessary to learn. Name calling, bullying, and ridicule are unacceptable behaviors that must not be tolerated in the classroom. Teachers must also expand their knowledge on learning styles so that they can make sure that all students are performing at their maximum potential.

Responsibilities of Counselors

Strong guidance programs that understand the unique needs of ethnic minority students and encourage students to adapt a more rigorous course of work are essential to closing the gap. The Student Education Occupation Plan (SEOP), if used effectively, is a beginning step in structuring an individual course of study. Counselors should assist students and their families who are unfamiliar with how to prepare for further education. Aligning students' course of study with college entrance requirements should begin in middle/junior high school and continue throughout high school. Counselors can model the idea of inclusion. For example, the counselor's office must be a safe, warm, inviting space for students. If a student needs a place to pray daily due to religious beliefs, the counselor should help facilitate that student's need. Often, the counselor is held exclusively accountable for creating an inclusive school climate. This should not be the case; the school climate is everyone's responsibility.

Developing a Culturally Competent Staff

Introduction

Cultural competence is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, in an agency, or among professionals and enables that system or agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations (Cross et al., 1989). In other words, it is the ability of a person from one culture to respect, appreciate, and value a person from a different culture, whether it is in the classroom, in the workplace, or across the globe.

Being Culturally Competent

There are essential elements that define and contribute to one's ability to become more culturally competent. The elements are:

- *Valuing diversity throughout the educational system*—The individual is able to see, understand, and appreciate the positive contributions of every group within a pluralistic society.
- *Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment*—The individual is able to examine and understand his/her own cultural background, and is able to recognize both the commonalities and differences, personal biases and prejudices that may affect his/her interactions with students, parents, and colleagues from diverse cultures.
- *Being conscious of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact, and being able to knowledgeably and tactfully navigate the educational system*—Research has shown that teachers who collaborate and communicate effectively with other educators, families, and community resources are more successful in providing appropriate services to meet the needs of their ethnic minority students. Teacher/student relationships matter.
- *Institutionalizing cultural knowledge of students within the school population so that strategies to meet the learning needs of the students are devised*—Banks (2006), Gay (2000), and Ladson-Billings (1994) state that “equity pedagogy” exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse groups.
- *Developing and implementing a diversity strategic framework which aggressively seeks to increase a diverse workforce and inclusive environment*—This framework is critically important to achieving cultural competency. Unless the educational systems combine hiring practices with strategies to recruit and retain a diverse workforce, the desired effect and outcomes will not be realized. Such a framework must be part of a systemic approach.

- *Creating the sense of belonging that is a necessary component in a positive school experience*—Schools that embrace diversity and make deliberate efforts to include and value everyone are making efforts to increase the academic performance of ethnic minority students. Ethnic minority students and parents often feel a sense of disconnect with the school. Parents who speak a language other than English feel welcomed when there is someone with whom they can communicate and is readily available at the front office. Information that is sent home should reflect the culture of the household to which it is sent.
- *Moving educators beyond acknowledging the reality of the racial/ethnic achievement gap and toward developing a strategy for eliminating it*—In general, there are three critical factors necessary for school systems to close the racial/ethnic achievement gap: passion, practice, and persistence. “Emboldened with passion, enabled with practice and strengthened by persistence, we can create schools in which all students achieve at higher levels, achievement gaps are narrowed and the racial predictability and disproportionality of high and low student achievement are eliminated” (Singleton and Linton, 2006, p. 12).

Responsibilities of Utah State Office of Education

The Utah State Board of Education and the Utah State Office of Education have endorsed the Respecting Ethnic And Cultural Heritage (REACH) training program for statewide implementation. A REACH-trained faculty is a faculty committed to a culturally responsive environment and education for all students. Some examples of other programs that complement the REACH training include “Teacher, They Called Me a ----!”, Gender Equity and Student Achievement (GESA), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), and Courageous Conversation about Race. A word of caution—one or two days of training does not make one culturally competent. The professional development must be a long-term, sustained effort.

Responsibilities of Local School Boards

Mission statements must strongly state the intent and purpose of the school district to value and practice inclusion and diversity. All school boards can demonstrate this commitment to cultural competency by ensuring that all appointed committees and task forces are representative of the population of the community. Implementing policies that mandate cultural competency training on a regular basis is the role that local school boards must play. Having written, established, and well-known procedures in place for and addressing concerns of discrimination is also critical. Review of discipline and academic records in light of racial and ethnic disparity will also shed light on what other policies and/or trainings need to be in place.

Responsibilities of School Leadership

In order to give all children the fair and equitable education they deserve, schools and teachers need to identify and utilize essential strategies to meet the needs of their student-of-color populations. Therefore, it is critical that schools address issues

regarding race to uncover whatever institutionalized/individual biases exist that prevent students of color from reaching their fullest potential. Requiring long-term professional development in the areas of cultural competency and diversity is essential.

Responsibilities of Teachers

In conclusion, the old adage, “They don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care” is still true. Teachers who are successful with all students have made significant shifts in their viewpoints and have learned new pedagogical practices that are better matched to the needs of the students in their classrooms.

Responsibilities of Counselors

Counselors often serve as the link between the classroom and the home. Culturally competent counselors can build bridges where broken pathways once existed. This is achieved through community outreach and personal in-reach. Counselors’ offices should be safe, warm, and inviting places for students and parents of all races, creeds, and colors.



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Ensuring Educator Quality

Introduction

In this section, “educator” is loosely defined as a teacher or counselor. Both play a pivotal role in eliminating the gap. Teachers who are more experienced, who have strong academic foundations in the content areas they are teaching, and who practice equity pedagogy should be assigned to classes with students having the greatest need. Counselors who have expertise in working with a diverse student population and a wide array of academic levels serve as partners in the effort to close the gap.



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Current Practice

Research shows that the teachers with the most experience gravitate toward those schools that have the smallest numbers of students with the greatest needs, and that within most schools, the more experienced teachers choose to teach courses with the smallest number of students who are behind academically. Other research has found that a high percentage of teachers with less than three years of experience are teaching a large number of students who are poor or members of an ethnic minority group. These types of practices hamper efforts to close the achievement gap.

The Governor of Utah, in his 2008 State of the State Address, reported that Utah had a teacher deficit at the beginning of last school year:

[W]e are facing a challenge: this year our State was 400 teachers short of our schools' needs, which doubled last year's shortage. This trend is increasingly corrosive. It is time we put educators back on a pedestal.

The need for quality, certified teachers is critical. Therefore, the governor proposed the following:

[W]e must increase the number of educators being trained in our colleges. Right now 2,300 teachers graduate annually. In four years

we can, and should, have 1,000 more teachers coming out of our colleges every year to teach in our classrooms.

We must bolster our principals with the accountability and responsibility they need to manage their schools. Principals should be given the ability to reward the good teachers and replace the bad ones. They need the tools to assess accurately how students in their schools are faring (2008 State of the State Address, http://www.utah.gov/governor/news/2008/news_01_22_08.html).

The need for culturally competent, certified teachers is at the critically acute stage. An equally pressing problem is the need for ethnic minority teachers. Currently, less than three percent of the teaching force is ethnic minority.

In addition, the current state student-to-counselor ratio is overwhelming. The current average secondary ratio is 369 students to one counselor. The current average elementary ratio is 1,175 students to one counselor. This massive ratio is unacceptable if the achievement gap is to be closed. The ratio of counselors to students must be made more manageable. To achieve this goal, a collective effort to change policy and structure is needed.

Utah State Office of Education

An aggressive push to raise teacher compensation is always in order. However, retraining and retooling teachers to work with diverse populations should be at the forefront of any effort to improve education quality. Furthermore, there is strength in a diverse workforce; therefore, systematic efforts to increase the number of ethnic minority teachers is a part of ensuring educator quality to meet the needs of ethnic minority students.

There are many Utah schools that have ethnic minority students but do not have one certified ethnic minority teacher. Continued use of the T. H. Bell Scholarship is a good step; however, more needs to be done. Developing a “grow your own” framework by creating programs in which minority paraprofessionals can pursue a bachelor’s degree and a teaching certificate is a step in the right direction. Establishing a partnership with a junior or community college to build a two-year pre-service teaching program, and then transitioning students to four-year institutions, could be another avenue to pursue.

Responsibilities of Local School Boards

In order to address negative teacher assignment practices, local school boards may need to negotiate alternatives for placement and/or transfers. Boards should consider the idea of incentives, both economic and non-economic (more time, fewer students in a classroom, more technology support) for teachers who are willing to serve in schools aggressively working to close the achievement gap. When boards merely talk about high standards and tough accountability systems, but fail to give students a highly qualified, well-prepared, professional teacher in the classroom,

their work does not support the requirements necessary for reducing the achievement gap (Reeves, 2004).

In addition, strong recruitment initiatives are needed, such as developing formal partnerships with historically Black colleges and universities and American Indian Tribal colleges; including minority teachers or community members on recruiting trips; collaborating with the business community to create incentive packages (e.g., first month's rent free with signed teaching contract, no deposit; \$100 coupon for groceries at Smith's or Albertsons); developing community partnerships with districts to provide initial housing or gift packages to newly hired minority teachers; and increasing teacher compensation based upon teacher assignment in areas of high need. Teacher exchange programs with other countries should be part of the recruitment initiatives. Lastly, once ethnic minority teachers are hired, there must be retention strategies to keep them. Such strategies might include providing structured and sustained support for first-year teachers, establishing mentor (community and school) programs, increasing the number of ethnic minority teachers teaching honors and Advanced Placement classes, and providing opportunities for advancement within the profession. Likewise, the issue of decreasing the counselor/student ratio needs a well-thought-out framework, which may include hiring additional guidance support personnel such as parent liaisons and academic advisors.

Responsibilities of School Leadership

Principals need to be educated on effective pedagogy for diverse learners, and find ways to hold all teachers more accountable for the actual teaching and learning that goes on in classrooms—and this goes beyond test scores. Principals need to identify, document, recognize, and reward quality based on multiple factors. Teaching and learning are very complex processes, and test scores are only one factor for consideration of a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. Administrators need to be actively engaged and need to be observing, coaching, mentoring, and evaluating their teachers. Above all, principals need to provide and allow for opportunities to participate in professional development.

Responsibilities of Teachers

Teachers need intensive and extensive efforts to assist and support in improving their practice, especially in working with a diverse student population. Creating collaborative professional learning communities will enhance teachers' ability to teach effectively. The National Science Board has reported that mathematics teachers who participated in professional development activities based on standards-based curriculum materials for their classrooms were more likely to report using teaching practices that were aligned with reform goals. A collaborative learning community provides educators with an opportunity to dialogue about issues, study a specific issue, and search for and give solutions for the challenges they encounter. This is an important part of increasing educator quality. Professional development in content pedagogy, cognitive coaching, and policy updates is vital and must be ongoing for lifelong learning and continued growth.

Responsibilities of Counselors

Counselors need to reflect on their practices. Data on course-taking patterns, test scores, and parent and student evaluations serve as the beginning point of discussion. Professional development opportunities on topics such as identifying diverse learners for gifted classes, making the home-school connection stronger, and motivating the unmotivated will give counselors insight into how to better serve students and their families.

Enhancing Teaching and Learning

Introduction

A teacher's success is not based on any one element or single source. Effective teaching is a combination of many factors: a teacher's background, methods of interacting with others, teaching practices, knowledge of content, and pedagogy. In order to reach and teach all students, including those of ethnic minority background, teachers must be able to communicate clearly, provide a climate of support and encouragement, and engage students in the learning process. They must have effective management skills and the ability to communicate the expectation that all students can and will be successful in their class.



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Effective Teaching

Effective teachers:

- Expect all students to learn.
- Take responsibility to make sure students do learn.
- Hold high expectations, set high standards, and ensure the curriculum is appropriately challenging for all students.
- Vary teaching strategies, assignments, and assessment practices to meet individual learning needs and styles.
- Recognize each student as a multifaceted person, understanding that each student brings a lifetime of ideas and experiences to the classroom.
- Adjust instruction to help students, as individuals, to learn.
- Demonstrate cultural competency.
- Care about the students they teach.

Teaching is a complex process, and educators improve their teaching over the years. A teacher's experience counts. This means that in order to reduce the achievement gap, students lacking proficiency need to be placed with experienced teachers who have had time to develop and refine their teaching skills.

The Utah State Office of Education provides many professional development opportunities for teachers to hone their skills. The agency must ensure that culturally relevant pedagogy is embedded in the sessions offered.

Responsibilities of Local School Boards

Local school boards should ensure that funds are available to provide necessary professional development opportunities for teachers. A variety of sessions, as well as levels—beginning, intermediate, and advanced—are needed to provide sustained learning. Boards should be clear and concise in their expectations of teachers. A written protocol should be used to evaluate teachers and serve as the guide for professional development, job placement and, if needed, reprimand or termination.

Responsibilities of School Leadership

Utah districts should be held accountable for ensuring that high-risk students, including those from ethnic minority families, are taught by teachers with experience and who are highly qualified in the characteristics noted in the paragraphs above. This means that school districts must assist all teachers in developing background knowledge of diverse cultures and races, as well as pedagogy that is effective in dealing with diverse student learning needs.

Responsibilities of Teachers

Some of the research on teacher effectiveness (Chenoweth, 2006; Bottoms et al. 2003; Wimberley, 2002) has studied the relation of effectiveness to the affective characteristics of a teacher, as well as the emotional or social behaviors of teachers. Several studies show the importance of “caring”—including qualities such as patience, listening, understanding, knowledge of students as individuals, warmth and encouragement, and an overall love for children—in the eyes of students and teachers (Burrell, 2005; Delpit, 1995). This has meaning for closing the achievement gap. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds need to be placed with teachers who truly value the culture and heritage children bring into a classroom. This means that teachers need to have more knowledge about the varied cultures and beliefs of the students they teach. Most teachers do not have personal knowledge about many cultures. This means that professional development is needed to help teachers know more about the cultures of students and families within the schools of Utah. This must be included in pre-service as well as in-service programs.

Effective teachers adjust their instruction to help students learn. Closing the achievement gap will require teachers to differentiate their curricula, assignments, and assessments. Teachers must know how to target instruction for specific skill building and to adjust assessments within groups. Teaching to the mainstream

groups within a classroom will not reduce the achievement gap for students from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Effective teachers display a high level of professionalism and a commitment to their own personal learning by taking classes, participating in professional development, attending conferences, and participating in collaborative learning opportunities. Effective teachers use feedback to improve their ability to have a positive impact on student learning. In order to reduce the achievement gap, students need teachers who are participating in experiences such as those noted above and who are working with other professionals, discussing their practices, observing and being observed by others, and receiving feedback on their teaching and on the learning occurring in their classroom.

Responsibilities of Counselors

Counselors and teachers should work together to ensure good student placement. Counselors should attend classes to provide the opportunity to see students at work. This insight is helpful during the professional discussions. Through professional discussions, counselors and teachers can not only ensure that ethnic minority students are in rigorous, challenging and appropriate classes, but also that those students have the support, if needed, to be successful in those classes.



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Demanding a Rigorous and Relevant Curriculum

Introduction

A rigorous and relevant curriculum begins in pre-kindergarten and continues throughout the academic career of the student. “Planning to go to college” is not a prerequisite for taking a rigorous curriculum. All students, including ethnic minorities, should be encouraged to take a rigorous curriculum, regardless of college plans. This rigor is relevant to both course selection and course content.

Secondary school counselors need to inform students and parents about all options relating to course sequence, high school completion requirements, and post-secondary education. Students and parents must have all of the necessary information to make the best-informed decision about next-step planning. The philosophy and expectation should be that every student is preparing for some type of post-secondary education. Counselors should provide the groundwork, educate and inform students individually about all options, and foster the next-step planning process based on the goals, objectives, and desires of each individual student.

The Process to Rigor and Relevance

Essential components to develop, implement, and increase the participation of ethnic minorities in rigorous coursework include the following:

- Early preparation is essential.
 - Reading with young children provides a foundation for success and lifelong learning.
 - Pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs with strong academic components are critical to successful school completion.
 - Expectations for going to college should be instilled in children in pre-kindergarten.
- Rigor must be contained in all courses, with expectations for student commitment and success.
 - Students must be continually encouraged, motivated, and engaged in their own academic success.
 - The climate of the school must include a clear focus on academic achievement above and beyond any other principle, including rules and policies.
 - Teachers need to make sure their assignments are meaningful and include critical thinking.
 - Achievement-related school and course goals must be routinely discussed, evaluated, and monitored by teacher teams.
 - All curricula should be multicultural, not as an add-on but as an integral part of the course of study.
- Educators must engage, motivate, and sustain students’ involvement in rigorous coursework.
 - High expectations are to be continually maintained, regardless of a student’s prior history of academic performance.

- Individual student assessment data must be used to improve curricula and assignments for students.
- Students are to be encouraged toward and have access to the most challenging courses, without being “screened out” due to prior poor performance.
- Advanced Placement (AP), concurrent enrollment (CE), and International Baccalaureate (IB) all need to be open and available for all students to participate within all districts and all schools.
- Educational support should be provided for students to be successful in rigorous coursework.
 - Required tutoring and extra instructional time should be given to struggling students by counselors and teachers.
 - Administrators, counselors, and teachers should take responsibility for ensuring students are directed to and get the necessary help they need for continued academic success.
 - Early warning systems, data assessment, and other means of evaluation (such as the Student Education Occupation Plan [SEOP]) should be used to identify issues that need attention.
 - Counselors should meet continually with students who need extra support and assistance, and involve parents on a time schedule that is compatible with the parents’ schedule.
 - A counselor should effectively identify a student’s academic status (using tools such as GPA and assessments), aptitudes, interests, strengths, weaknesses, abilities, etc., to formalize both rigorous academic schedule and a support framework based on each individual student, and leverage opportunities with programs such as the federal TRIO Programs. TRIO consists of six educational opportunity outreach programs targeted to serve low-income, first generation college students and students with disabilities to post-baccalaureate education. The six programs are Upward Bound, Talent Search, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs, and the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program.
 - Vertical teaming by feeder school, grade level, and/or subject area must be encouraged to support the success of each individual student. This is especially crucial between middle and high school. Counselors also need to be involved in this process for the academic, social, behavioral, and psychological support and success of each student.
 - Schools should foster academic learning communities through a core of disciplined academic teachers, as well as smaller class sizes and outreach to parents.

The Benefits of Rigor and Relevance

The benefit of a rigorous and relevant curriculum can be seen in the results. *Yes We Can* (2006) stated that students who take math beyond Intermediate Algebra double their chances of earning a bachelor's degree. Students who are well prepared for post-secondary education are very likely to persist in four-year institutions. Students who take rigorous coursework in high school have been shown to account for more than 80% of those students who stayed on the persistence track to a bachelor's degree or were retained by their initial institution.

Furthermore, while first-generation status is an important predictor of success in post-secondary education, rigorous preparation in high school substantially narrows the gap in post-secondary outcomes between first-generation students and their peers whose parents graduated from college (Warburton et al., 2001).

The Utah System of Higher Education

The Utah System of Higher Education (USHE) has a mission to provide college access and to assist all students and parents with making informed decisions about preparing for, participating in, completing, and paying for higher education in Utah. As a part of this mission, the commissioner of USHE has implemented the **Utah Scholars Initiative** (USI). The USI is designed to help students become better prepared for the rigor of a college education. Students are targeted, given information, and encouraged to sign up for the USI in the eighth grade.

Students are encouraged to enroll, participate in, and complete the following course sequence in high school.

1) The Utah Scholars Initiative:

- 4 years of English
- 3 years of math, including Elementary Algebra (Algebra I), Geometry, Intermediate Algebra (Algebra II), and an advanced math class beyond Algebra II
- 3 years of lab-based natural science (Biology, Chemistry, and Physics)
- 3½ years of social studies
- 2 years of a language (other than English)

2) Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses and tests

- 2 AP or IB courses in high school and a minimum passing score on the exams for those classes, or

3) Utah Concurrent Enrollment Program

- Completion of 6 credits of concurrent enrollment in core academic areas (English, math, science, social studies, or foreign language) with no course grade lower than a "B"

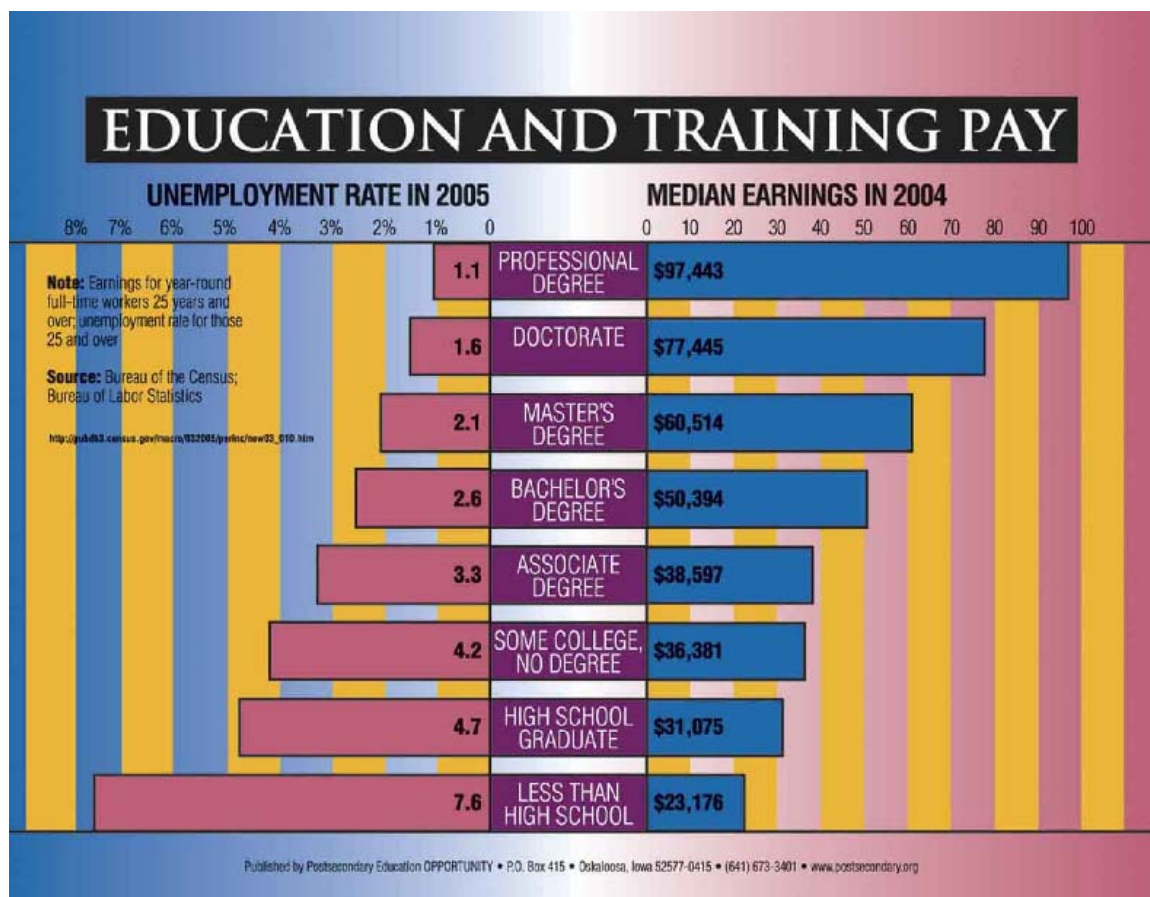
In addition to taking regular coursework, students should examine the possibility of taking International Baccalaureate (IB), Advanced Placement (AP), or concurrent

enrollment (CE) courses while in high school. There should be open access to these standards for a rigorous curriculum. Nontraditional strategies and approaches must be utilized to recruit and retain ethnic minorities in these classes. Appendix A provides a brief description of these options. Appendix B describes financial incentives for students who pursue a rigorous course of study.

The End Result of Rigor and Relevance

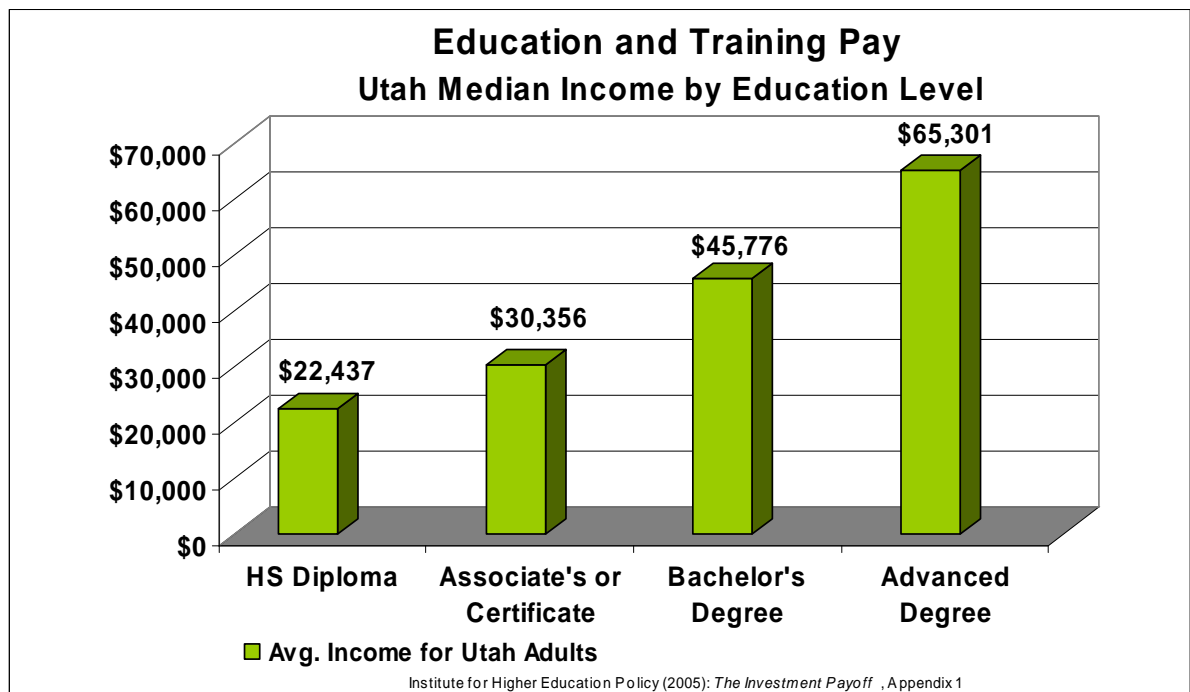
Students who attend institutions of higher education obtain a myriad of benefits, financial and personal. Also, society as a whole obtains direct and indirect benefits when citizens have access to post-secondary education. The civic engagement, health, and finances of people who participate in higher education are better than those of people who do not participate. Also, graduates of higher education are more likely to have employee benefits such as health insurance, retirement programs, and leave time. In the figure demonstrated below, the higher the education attained, the greater the income over a lifetime.

Figure 5: Education and Training Pay: National



Sandy Baum and Kathleen Payea, "Education Pays 2004: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society," The College Board.

Figure 6: Education and Training Pay: Utah Median Income by Education Level



Responsibilities of All

The Utah State Office of Education must evaluate all Core Curricula to ensure that rigor and relevance are present. School boards must ensure that students completing their local graduation framework have the courses and skills needed to enter and complete the coursework at a post-secondary institution.

The school leadership, through policy and practices, must ensure that rigor exists in all courses, that advanced courses are open and accessible to all students, and that teachers have the skills and tools necessary to provide rigor and relevance in all coursework. Teachers need to examine their belief systems concerning students and intelligence. Teachers need to become skilled in understanding how learning takes place. Teachers should remove any barriers, personal or professional, that would in any way block a student from having a successful experience in their classrooms. Parents, working in concert with counselors, should not only insist that their child take some advanced courses, but should also work together to create systems of support of those rigorous academic pursuits. Students must be engaged in their own learning. In some cases they need to be taught how to engage in the learning process. In other cases they simply need to be encouraged. In most cases, they just need a chance—an opportunity to succeed in the classroom.

Planning for Strategic Prevention and Intervention

Introduction

There are two ways to approach a problem. One way is to stop it from happening (prevention), and the other way is correct it (intervention). Both methods are needed to eliminate the achievement gap. Due to limited resources and the urgency of the problem, strategic prevention combined with targeted intervention would be the best way to approach this challenge.

Prevention

Adjusting the educational system so that all students are achieving the expected outcome is one approach to prevention. Knowing that students who struggle with math at the third grade level will more than likely struggle with Algebra I presents a great opportunity to adjust the system to prevent those low scores in Algebra. Such prevention techniques include vertical teaming, smaller learning communities and adult mentors.

Vertical Teaming

One of the best prevention strategies is vertical teaming—that is, establishing and maintaining a working relationship with the feeder schools in the core subject areas. The teams develop a series of “power standards” (standards that must be taught, and that are coordinated from elementary through high school in English, math, social studies, and science). A strong elementary, middle/junior high, and high school vertical team prevents students from falling through the cracks. As a student transitions from one school to another, maintaining a strong positive relationship with his/her family can ensure that school personnel also know the student’s siblings and understand the dynamics of the family and the culture that exists in the home.

Smaller Learning Communities

The United States Department of Education awards discretionary grants to local school districts that are committed to improving student achievement at large public high schools. The concept is to create smaller learning communities, through the use of such concepts as ninth grade centers, career academics, and “houses” or schools within schools, in which students feel a sense of belonging in order to increase their chance of success. High expectations, rigorous and relevant curricula, personalized and decentralized education, and parental involvement are key elements of the Smaller Learning Communities model. The ultimate goal of Smaller Learning Communities is to raise achievement and eliminate the achievement gap.

Adult Mentors

Ethnic minority students in predominately White schools can be successfully prepared for college preparatory courses when the schools link the students to specific adult mentors. Adult mentor programs offer stability for the student and access to information the student may not ordinarily be privy to.

Embedded Strategies Within the System

Schools should have an early warning system in place to detect the beginning of a performance problem. When the school makes parental involvement a priority, parents are engaged throughout the school year. The inclusion of the parent early on in the process usually results in a quicker resolution of the problem.

A structured review of student achievement and progress by counselors, especially during a transition year (elementary to middle school or middle to high school), would serve to identify students who are struggling. The feeder schools should notify the new school of any student at risk, and provide assessment data for program placement in the core subject areas. Thus, immediate support or interventions—mandatory summer school, additional tutoring, or accelerated courses—could be applied to help ensure that the student begins the next section of his/her education on or above grade level.

Interventions

Interventions work more efficiently when the problem is diagnosed early and all stakeholders are a part of creating the solution. Ethnic minority students and parents should have a significant voice in this process. In most cases, “more of the same” is not the best answer; schools must be willing to “think outside the box” and approach a subject or topic in a different manner in order to achieve student mastery of the work. For example, Robert Moses, founder of the national math literacy program The Algebra Project, teaches mathematics using a nontraditional approach. He has developed sustainable, student-centered models built on coalitions of stakeholders in historically underserved populations. Extended year, extended day, or intense summer camp programs are interventions that have been successful in closing the gap.

Responsibilities of All

Strategic prevention and invention require a collective effort because they imply systemic change. If equity and excellence are to reign, some things must change. Paradigms may be shifted in the process. With guidance from state and local governing bodies, expertise from professional educators in the field, and input from parents and community, the achievement levels of all students, including ethnic minority students, can be raised and the achievement gap can be eliminated.

Collaborating With Parents and Families

Introduction

Parents (caregivers) are their children's first and most important teachers and decision makers. When parents are aware of the expectations at school, they can make informed choices for their children's school experiences in the home and the community. Many factors contribute to a student's potential for academic success. It is especially critical that schools make a concerted effort to engage culturally diverse families to ensure student success.

Engaging Parents

More than sending a flyer home will be needed in order to get ethnic minority parents actively involved on school decision-making committees. A relationship must be established first. A positive relationship builds trust, and trust leads to engagement. Avenues to this positive relationship include extending a personal invitation to parents to attend a function (then talking *with* them and not *at* them when they arrive at school), or hosting a school event at a community location frequented by ethnic minority parents. School personnel who attend an event hosted or attended by the ethnic minority community can resolve more in a conversation with the parent at that event than they could ever do at a scheduled 15-minute parent/teacher conference.

Parental Involvement

The Utah State Board of Education recognizes the importance of involving parents in the education of their child. On March 4, 2005, the State Board of Education adopted a parental involvement resolution that lists six essential elements needed to enhance parental involvement:

- Interactive communication
- Responsible parenting
- Parental assistance to student learning
- Schools that are open and inviting to parents
- Partnerships between parents and schools on the decisions that affect children and families
- Available community resources

Understanding Families

Understanding family structure through a cultural lens is necessary if schools want to increase their parental participation. Knowing the importance of the elders in an American Indian family or the Fahu in a Pacific Islander family will prevent schools from making the fatal error of dismissing those persons because they are not the mother or father of the child. In some situations, the elder is the leader of the family and a person the school should be including in the conversation.

It is interesting to see how a teacher sets up for parent conference. There are usually three chairs—one for the teacher, one for the mother and one for the father.

So, when, a single mother shows up with all the children including the student, there is an awkward moment of finding extra chairs. Some ethnic minority families will bring a family group to the conference, not just the two parents. Unless the teacher is culturally competent, it will be an awkward conference because the teacher will not know who he/she should be talking to or to what extent confidential information should be shared.

Responsibilities of All

Any partnership requires the commitment of both parties. However, one party must take the initiative in the beginning. Parents today may have had negative experiences while students themselves, such as having their mouths washed out with soap if they spoke their native language or having been removed from their homes to attend boarding schools. Because of today's pressures in the workforce and daily life, many parents, while very concerned about their child's education, are not actively engaged with the opportunities that schools provide to include parents. This report suggests that the school take the initiative to begin fostering a sustained, positive relationship with the ethnic minority parents and members of the ethnic minority community. Extending a genuine hand of welcome is a step in the right direction.

Schools must focus on building trust between the school and the community. A positive relationship coupled with a philosophy of partnership will enable schools and parents to work together for the benefit of the child. A school framework to diminish or eliminate the achievement gap that does not have minority parental involvement is destined for limited results. At any grade level, ethnic minority parents must be a part of their children's educational journey.



Establishing Community and Business Partnerships

Introduction

Community and business entities collaborating with schools and parents are integral parts of affecting and sustaining change in schools. Providing resources and programs, particularly enrichment activities, is critical to eliminating the achievement gap.

Community Partnerships

Schools should make every effort to maintain working relationships with social and community organizations, faith-based organizations, and informal community leaders. The continuous presence of community leaders and organizations in the school setting sends a clear and concise message of unity of purpose. These individuals and organizations should be engaged in a variety of activities, from speaking in classes to volunteering in the offices to serving on committees. Both their insight and involvement are valuable in creating an inclusive learning environment.

Business Partnerships

Businesses have always been a part of schools. A good deal of the time, their involvement has been superficial—providing cookies at a meeting or setting up a display for a week. However, in order to create a stronger partnership, efforts must be made to involve the business community in curriculum issues, such as banks in accounting classes, or electricity companies in physical science or physics classes. Businesses can serve as great bridges for ethnic minority students between school and the world of work. Offering classes on the high school campus that lead to certification in some trade expands the options that students have. Businesses providing opportunities for real-life, hands-on experience as a part of the extended curriculum of a course may be very valuable to ethnic minority students.

Businesses have provided paid summer internships that have also proven to be valuable experiences for ethnic minority students. In turn, businesses are developing relationships with future employees. Teachers, too, can benefit from this partnership. Many larger corporations have a diversity division that trains employees on issues related to diversity, multiculturalism and global citizenry. Why not include educators as participants in that training?

Adult mentors from the business community can provide ethnic minorities with access to the real world of work. Mentors can help students to connect what they are learning in school with what they will need for future employment. But more than anything, adult mentors can serve as encouragers for many ethnic minority students.

Responsibilities of All

Local chambers of commerce can design and implement scholarship programs or programs that offer incentives for academic achievement. Examples of business

partnership include paying students to take Advanced Placement classes or exams, conducting leadership camps for historically underserved students, and providing employees with paid time to volunteer at schools. Schools can engage business and community representatives in meaningful work at the schools. Each entity must make the effort to build a stronger connection, channel the effort to raise student achievement, and communicate the value of a quality education.



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Holding All Stakeholders Accountable

Defining Accountability

The concept of accountability in this report is synonymous with ownership for measuring and revising methods for eliminating the achievement gap and for ensuring that every ethnic minority student in Utah will graduate from high school with the requisites for success as a productive member of society.



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Responsibilities of All

The ability to successfully integrate excellence and equity is the first step toward becoming accountable for all students and their success. **Local education agencies** (LEAs) must then begin to measure their progress toward this integration. An educational entity (school or district) that is accountable for improving graduation rates and higher education enrollment for a college-ready, work-ready society is one focused on a holistic approach to educational excellence. This requires careful planning and implementation. An annual framework should include a means, therefore, of measuring the annual progress made in each of the following areas:

- Data analysis
- School climate
- Cultural competency
- Educator quality
- Effective teaching
- Rigorous curriculum
- Prevention and intervention
- Parental involvement
- Community partnerships

Data analysis begins this process, but it alone is not sufficient. With the measurement of success and struggles must also come the ownership to implement change as needed.

Local education agencies are tasked to both analyze data and make plans for the utilization of such data in order to move forward with the mission to increase the achievement of all students, with a particular focus on groups of students deemed statistically at risk when data is disaggregated. The **Utah State Office of Education** should monitor data and school/district frameworks for accuracy of reports and for efficacy of frameworks. This is part of state oversight in federal programs, as well as Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (UPASS) accountability requirements.

Traditional measures of success, including the disaggregation of graduation rates, dropout rates, Advanced Placement course enrollment, and the like, are critical to data analysis by school leadership. Setting the standard of excellence and equity and putting systems in place to achieve that goal is crucial. Systemic standards are indicative of a belief structure that either supports or denounces individual student potential.

Schools must be held responsible for a school culture that welcomes all students and works to meet all students' diverse needs. This requires culturally competent and highly skilled **educators** capable of differentiating instruction based on the identification of specific student needs and goals. A rigorous multicultural curriculum will be inherent in any school culture with such foundations. The curriculum, in its rigor, will have high and realistic expectations for all students, regardless of background. Students will be grounded in the expectation of excellence as they are prepared for post-secondary school learning experiences, beginning in early childhood programs and continuing through secondary school.

Even with a rigorous and research-based curriculum steeped in accepted best practices, each school must be accountable for providing intervention programs as needed, based on data analysis. Parent and community input and support must be sought out in order to make such interventions effective. Local education agencies have the necessary resources to eliminate the achievement gap and ensure all students graduate college ready and work ready, if they maximize the expertise and support available in the home and community at large.

The responsibility of educating America's future is not the school's alone. All stakeholders need to be involved and accountable in the process. **Parents and families** must instill in children the value of an education and insist that their children get one. The **parent and community** voice must be heard. Silence does not help—it hinders.

It is only through a collective effort that the achievement gap can be eliminated. Many recommendations have been made in this report. These recommendations have been selected for both their effectiveness and practicality. This report does not seek to increase the difficulty of educating our state's students, but rather to maximize our effectiveness and eliminate the mentality that accepts mere pockets of excellence in place of general excellence, in an effort to hold all districts, all schools, and all teachers accountable for excellence in public education.



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Understanding the Real Goal

Getting a high school diploma is not the real goal. The real goal is beyond high school. The real goal is preparing ethnic minority students to adequately compete in the workplace or the college classroom.

College ready is work ready. The U.S. Department of Labor predicts that 70% of the 30 fastest growing jobs will require education beyond high school, and 40% of all new jobs will require at least an associate's degree.

According to the Utah Higher Education Assistance Authority (UHEAA), students who would like to attend a four-year college or university should begin the process of preparation between fifth and eighth grade. For students wishing to attend a two-year institution of higher learning or other post-secondary opportunities such as technical or vocational school, the preparation begins in seventh or eighth grade.

General college admissions requirements include four years of English, three years of mathematics (Elementary Algebra through Trigonometry), three years of biological/physical science with laboratory experience, one year of American history, two years of a foreign language, and four years of additional coursework from at least two of the following groups: English, history, math beyond Intermediate Algebra, foreign language, lab science, social science, or fine arts.

In order to attain the real goal, we must inform both students and parents about the course of study needed. Then we must actively and aggressively pursue the course of academic excellence. We must also make systematic changes in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the achievement gap. Raising achievement and eliminating the gap will increase the graduation rate. A higher graduation rate with a more rigorous course of study will lead to more successful post-secondary education and work experiences.

Implications for Policymakers

Higher Education

Post-secondary education must be a viable option for ethnic minority students. In today's world, **college ready is work ready**. Colleges, universities, technical, and vocational schools must work with Utah high schools to ensure that more ethnic minority students not only are able to enroll in higher education, but are successful once they arrive. Recruitment and retention are critical to keeping talented youth in the state. Support services should be readily available and easy to access, with strong, required support given during the students' freshman year.

In addition, colleges and universities must seek ways to restructure their teacher education training. Diversity and multicultural courses must be a requirement for graduation from any teacher education program in the state. If the current statistical trend toward a growing non-minority teacher force and a growing minority student population continues, these courses will be critical to the successful connection between student and teacher.

Local and State Entities

Aggressive policies and procedures to increase the number of minority teachers in the state of Utah should be in place. This report does not support or endorse the concept that the teacher and the students should be of the same ethnicity. This report simply suggests that providing role models that students can identify with has always been a sound practice. In addition, if diversity is to be valued in this state, it must be reflected in its practices.

Educational equity is a mainstay for quality education. Using data and best practices, policies and procedures should be adapted to adequately address the needs of ethnic minority students within a district/charter school. Funding and resources must be in place for the programs and systematic changes that will need to take place in order to raise the achievement level of ethnic minority students.

The achievement gap is not an individual student problem. It is not an ethnic group problem. It exists because there is a disconnect between schooling and a growing population that it serves. The school system is not broken; it is in need of an upgrade.

Development Process

The Utah Student Achievement Plan is the result of a collaborative effort of school and district representatives, university and business representatives, parents, community leaders, and the Utah State Office of Education. In the beginning, the Minority Graduation Steering Committee divided its work into five major areas: pre-service/in-service professional development, parental involvement, successful interventions and strategies, preparation for post-secondary education, and accountability issues. After a thorough research of best practices facilitated by a set of guiding questions, the committee's focus changed and minority student achievement became the guiding principle. Focus groups and public hearings were held across the state. After receiving input from stakeholders, the document was revised. A final review committee was convened and more revisions were made. The document was then presented to the State Board of Education Study Group on Minority Student Achievement and the Board Curriculum Committee.

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Appendix A: Specific Rigorous Academic Programs

International Baccalaureate (IB) Courses

International Baccalaureate (IB) courses are rigorous courses that compose a challenging two-year liberal arts curriculum that leads to a diploma and meets the requirements established by the International Baccalaureate program. IB students are required to take courses in six areas, complete the Theory of Knowledge course, write an extended essay, and participate in CAS. Students taking these courses are in grades 11 and 12, and must meet all requirements and pass examinations in each subject area in order to receive the IB diploma. In some schools, students who are not seeking the IB diploma are allowed to take individual IB courses and the subsequent exams.

Advanced Placement (AP) Courses

Advanced Placement courses are college-level courses in 20 different subjects, from arts and music to calculus and English, that help students get ready for college during high school. There are a total of 35 different AP courses to choose from; however, no single high school teaches all of these courses. Students who score high enough (3-5) on the AP exams may receive college course credit. This saves time and money, as students may be able to take fewer classes in college. A student who takes an Advanced Placement class increases his/her chance of graduating from college. Whether he/she takes the AP Exam is irrelevant; it is exposure to the more rigorous curriculum that sets the stage for college graduation.

Concurrent Enrollment (CE) Courses

Concurrent enrollment classes are college-level classes offered to high school students for both high school and college credit. College credits are recorded on a permanent college transcript regardless of the grade received, so students must take this into consideration when selecting one of these courses.

Appendix B: Financial Incentives and Rewards

Rewards such as grants and scholarships are available for students who complete a rigorous course of study while in high school. Students who meet the Utah Scholars Initiative requirements, regardless of other factors, are more likely to participate and complete a higher education. Also, by completing this program a student may qualify for one or both of two federal programs designed to award students financial assistance while in high school. In order to qualify for both of these grant programs, students must be **Pell eligible**, as determined by the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). These two programs are briefly described below:

Federal Academic Competitiveness Grants (ACGs)

- First-year and second-year undergraduate students
- Based on college preparatory course of study while in high school
- \$750 for first year
- \$1,300 for second year if a B average is maintained

Federal National Science and Mathematics Access to Retain Talent (SMART) Grant

- Major in math, science, engineering, technology, or a critical foreign language
- Must maintain 3.0 GPA
- Third year: \$4,000
- Fourth year: \$4,000

New Century Scholarship

The state of Utah also has the New Century Scholarship for students interested in completing a rigorous program of study.

The New Century Scholarship Program was created by the 1999 Utah Legislature to provide scholarship opportunities to Utah students who complete, with a cumulative 3.0 GPA, the requirements of an associate's degree, its equivalent, or the approved math and science curriculum at a state institution of higher education by September 1 of the year they graduate from a Utah high school. It is important that students, parents, and counselors understand the requirements of the scholarship and for interested students to begin planning their high school and college curriculum early (seventh or eighth grade). The scholarship award equals 75% of an eligible student's tuition costs for up to two years (60 credit hours) at any of Utah's state-operated institutions of higher education offering baccalaureate programs.

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